

Kunihiko Ikuhara IRC Chat Interview

Kunihiko Ikuhara is best known for his work as a director on the later *Sailor Moon* TV series, the *Utena* TV series, and the recent *Utena* movie.

This is a transcript of the interview that was conducted via moderated IRC Oct 8, 2000 in #auditorium on events.scifi.com following Ikuhara's visit to the New York Anime Festival. All questions were submitted by the audience.

Q: Could you tell us a little about *Schell Bullet*, your project with Nagano Mamoru?

A: What about *Schell Bullet*?

Q: I think anything you tell us would be much appreciated.

A: Right now VOL. 2 of the novel came out this summer. The *Schell Bullet* Music CD came out as well. The CD features me and the voice actress Maria Kawamura singing.

Q: Do you feel *Powerpuff Girls* is an homage to *Sailor Moon*?

A: I wouldn't be able to tell.

Q: Where did you first hear of J.A. Seazer, and why did you choose to use that style of "choral rock" for *Utena*?

A: I was a teenager when I first heard of J.A. Seazer. Just like in the U.S. in the late 1960's there was a student movement in Japan. And J.A. Seazer was a charismatic idol of the student activists in the late 1960's. By that time, I found about J.A. Seazer when the student movement in Japan was over. But his music still carried all the energy from the times of the student movement. And that was the scream wanting to change the world. I was strongly attracted to his music. I was just a high school student when I found out about J.A. Seazer in my teens, but I decided that I wanted to work with him someday. And the *Revolutionary Girl Utena* got the go ahead. I knew that J.A. Seazer's music would be the one to match the theme of the show. So I visited J.A. Seazer with the project proposal sheet of *Utena*... And he was able to relate to the theme of *Utena*. It was a wonderful experience. I was able to fulfill the dream I had from my teenage years. That was to be able to work with the idol I had in my teenage years. And as I expected, *Utena's* music was received

in Japan as a sensation. A lot of people have forgotten his music since the 60's. So by working with *Utena*, J.A. Seazer was able to return to the mainstream in Japan. And that's something I'm proud of.

Q: Ikuhara-san, Chiho Saito has said that you have never told her the truth about it, could you explain the significance of Mickey and his stopwatch. What exactly is his role on the Council?

A: It has a very deep significance. His stopwatch contains the key to open all the mysteries of the world. And Mickey is the only one who knows that. So I don't know what it is either.

Q: I am under the impression that in the *Utena* movie the girl who fell out of the boat was Juri and not Utena (there has been considerable debate over this issue among fans) If this is indeed the case, why does Utena feel like she killed her prince? (please correct me if I'm wrong in my understanding of the movie. I thought she felt this way, but since I have only watched it without subtitles I might be mistaken.)

A: It was Juri who fell off the boat. And the reason why Utena thinks she killed the prince, is because Utena realized that Touga was dead. By realizing that Touga was dead, Utena realized that she no longer needed a prince. And that was her departure from the girl's world of dependence (on the prince) into a grownup's world.

Q: Ikuhara-san, several people have asked how you became involved with animation, and what the best training is for students who want to work in animation?

A: You should try by tracing other people's styles... That's how they all get started in Japan too.

Q: Ikuhara-san, you seem to enjoy turning people into cars. Have you considered working on a series such as "Transformers" where that kind of thing happens more often?

A: No.

Q: Did you get to keep the leather outfit you wore on the *Schell Bullet* CD? [\[picture\]](#)

A: Yes. I have it. I go shopping to the supermarket in that outfit sometimes.

Q: Do you have a favorite voice actress in Japan you like to work with?

A: No one in particular right now.

Q: When you dressed up as Sailor Scout [Sailor Mars specifically -ed.] what was the public's general reaction? [[picture 1](#), [picture 2](#)]

A: That wasn't me. That was Ray Hino. Actually, I had a stomachache and couldn't go that day. So, to substitute for me was my friend Ray Hino and Minako. They both have beautiful legs. A lot of guys took their photos. So I was a little jealous.

Q: In the Utena movie, did Kozue already turn into a car in that scene with Juri and Miki in that garage like scene? And was there a reason why Shiori had a larger part in the movie?

A: Yes, Kozue was already a car. And Shiori shows up a lot because I like the character Shiori. I tend to like girls who are mean but has [sic.] sexual tones...

Q: You seem to have a purpose of breaking stereotypes and encouraging intellectual thought. Do you fear and/or feel that your messages are not understood even by your fans?

A: I'm sure that depends on the people. But I'm happy when I'm told that someone likes a certain character. Of course I'm even happier if someone shows a deeper understanding of the story.

Q: You've said before that you're most like Chu-Chu. If Chu-Chu is a representation of Akio (be that his youth or his grasp on Anthy) does that mean you're actually more like Akio? Could you see yourself as a villain?

A: The first part of the question: Yes. the character I'm most like in Utena is Chu-Chu. And I don't think Chu-Chu is a representation of Akio, but since Anthy likes Akio Chu-Chu probably wears a necktie so that he can resemble Akio. So in the last episode, when Anthy leaves Akio, Chu-Chu takes off his necktie and returns it to Akio.

Q: I have heard of an unused plot for *Sailor Moon SuperS* involving a black Pegasus as well as a white one. Was this a real plot idea, or something made up by fans?

A: That was a real plot I had thought up. I was once up to directing the *Sailor Moon Super S* Movie. It was going to be a story in which Uranus and Neptune were the

main characters. It was going to be a story independant to the TV series and this was going to be the first appearance of Uranus and Neptune. And Sailor Neptune was going to be in a 1000-year sleep at a place called "The End of the World". And Sailor Uranus was needed to steal the talisman from the Sailor Scouts and use that to awaken Sailor Neptune. And Uranus was going to be riding the black pegasus. And the story was going to be that Sailor Moon would ride Pegasus to chase Sailor Uranus riding the Black Pegasus to the "End of the World". And the climax of the story would've been the rodeo scene between Sailor Moon on white Pegasus and Sailor Uranus on Black Pegasus. And so this was kind of story I had in mind. But before production began, the producer walked off Sailor Moon. It would've been possible for me to make the story still, but since I came up with the story with the producer, I also walked off. But I had an attraction to the idea of "The End of the World" which I thought up for this plot. So the same thing in *Utena* comes from the *Sailor Moon* plot.

Q: Ikuhara-san, *Utena* and *Sailor Moon* are two of the most popular anime amongst yuri fans. Do you intentionally include shoujo-ai subtexts in your work?

A: No. I'm still able to make a story where it's between a boy and a girl. But I feel irritated to see my girl getting together with some other guy. I've tried to kill off Tuxedo Mask in *Sailor Moon* many times. But no matter how many times I tried to kill him, he gets resurrected so I only get angrier. So I decided it would be way better if the girl just didn't have a boyfriend to begin with. Of course I'm just kidding. In reality, if I have a guy in the show, the love relationship gets to have a bigger role than the show. And that would be an interesting element, but I wouldn't want that to make that the scene-stealer of the show. Most other shoujo shows are in that direction. It's about who-and-who are getting together, or who-and-who are breaking up. I thought it would be a loss if that would be the big motif just because a girl was the main character. I think there could be more shows with other motives than that.

Q: Are you still involved with Madhouse?

A: Well I was just chatting with Executive Producer of Madhouse. We haven't talked about work. But we talked a lot about [sic.] what kind of girls we liked.

Q: Several people wonder if you have an opinion on the English language dubs of your work?

A: The TV show? Rachel [Lillis] is wonderful. Actually Rachel is with me in this room. So of course Rachel is wonderful.

Q: During some of your American appearances (specifically Anime Central in Chicago), when asked about Nanami's egg in *Utena*, you replied "It's better that you didn't know." Could you explain why it's better that we didn't know?

A: That's because it hides the secret to why humans exist on Earth. It's too terrifying that I can't tell it to you. That's why you shouldn't know either.

Q: Does Mr. Ikuhara have an address we can send fan mail to?

A: To Rachel. Send it to ptek97@bellatlantic.net. Or you can visit my website. My e-mail address is on the website. URL: <http://www.jrt.co.jp/yos/ikuniweb/>

Q: What do you feel is the future of animation in general? What would you like to see?

A: I would like to see shows with a lot of girls. And as for the animation industry... I would be happier if more girls became animators. I wish it would become off-limits to guys, except for myself of course.

Q: Can Rachael do ALL the voices for all the girls?

A: Well Rachael Lillis is here right now so... of course.

Q: Silly question, but what exactly is "revolutionizing the world" exactly?

A: It means to break the eggshell.

Q: What has been the biggest challenge for you in your work?

A: In all contexts, working on *Utena* was the biggest challenge. Since I was my own producer, there was a lot of financial risk. And most of the staff except for the main staff never worked with me before. So before we started, I wasn't fully confident if I would be able to finish the job. There was a lot of pressure in the preproduction phase. I wondered if this would be the last show I'd ever work on. So I was going to make this the pinnacle of the work I'd done (at that time). So I worked with my teenage idol, J.A. Seazer. And I collaborated with one of the top shoujo manga artists, Chiho Saito. And to work with Shinya Hasegawa, who walked with me in the career path on *Sailor Moon*. So, as it was going to be my pinnacle, it was also exciting work. It wasn't a corporate produced work. So I was also excited that I was producing my own show. So it was very difficult. But at the same time, it was very memorable and in retrospect, very fun. I know that I'm able to have this chat with you, because I was able to overcome this challenge. So I have a lot to thank for the

show *Utena*. And I also thank everyone who watched and cheered for the show. It was *Revolutionary Girl Utena* that led me to you all. I love you all.